



Rachelle despaired of finding the right school for her son until she discovered Baston House



BASTON HOUSE SCHOOL
DEVELOPING LEARNERS' SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

Rachelle lives in Lewisham with her three children, the eldest of whom, Raashaun, is twelve years old.

Sink or swim?

When choosing a school for a child there are many things to take into account, but for a parents with a child on the autistic spectrum the decisions can be much more difficult. Whilst some children with the condition may flourish in a mainstream setting, others will struggle and some may fall between the two categories. This was the situation in which Rachelle found herself with her son, Raashaun.

"We decided to send Raashaun to a mainstream primary school and for the first few years we had no major problems," she says. "Although he had some speech delay and a short attention span, the small and fairly informal environment suited him well and we were happy with the decision."

"It was only as he got older that things started to get more difficult as the school was not used to handling autistic children and they suggested we look for a place elsewhere. However, we persevered and he was able to stay there until the end."

Grey cloud of despair

It was a secondary level that Rachelle began to realise that something would have to change. "I was still convinced that Raeshaun would be fine in the mainstream as long as he had appropriate one-to-one support like any child with learning difficulties, but school after school turned us down. I did hours of research trying to find an answer, but had no help from anywhere and it was like a big grey cloud was hanging over me."

Enough is enough

Eventually, Rachelle found a school which would accept Raeshaun and was assured that his needs would be fully met in terms of extra help and support. "I was told that he would have a dedicated TA at all times but it soon became clear that this wasn't happening," she says. "When I was allowed to meet her I could see that she didn't have the specialist knowledge to deal with Raeshaun and he obviously wasn't coping well. Then he started taking time off school, through illness or just because he didn't want to go and it was only when I spoke to the parents of another child that I discovered he was being bullied. That was enough for me."

Fitting in at last

Rachelle approached Baston House which agreed to offer Raeshaun a place. "We went to visit and loved the warm welcome and the fact that they understood exactly what we needed."

Having completed a three-day trial period at Baston, Raeshaun pleaded to be allowed to go there. "He liked it straightaway and felt that he fitted in," says Rachelle. "The school was brilliant and managed the transfer very quickly so there was minimal disruption, and for the first time in many months I felt able to relax."



Small steps, big progress

Although Raeshaun has only been at Baston for a few weeks, family and friends have noted a marked difference in him. "There has been a dramatic change," explains Rachelle. "He used to go to school because he had to, now he actively enjoys it. He understands his lessons whereas before he often shut himself off and he is taking a real interest in what he is learning. At home he is much happier, sleeps better and is more affectionate, so the move to Baston has had a very positive effect on us all."

Lifting the pressure

Raeshaun has some catching up to do but Rachelle is confident that with his new interest in his lessons and the gentle approach of his teachers, he will do well. "He is not put under too much pressure and they won't push him too far until they have assessed his capabilities and I'm happy with that. Now that he is more comfortable in his school environment his self-esteem is increasing under a less intense system and my stress levels have decreased, too!"



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